

Arguments for European disintegration: a mobilisation analysis of anti-immigration speeches by UK political leaders

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Abstract

In this paper we develop a mobilisation analysis of contemporary antagonism to immigrants. We argue that such antagonism does not arise spontaneously from the cognitions of ordinary people but is mobilised by political actors. This leads us to ask *why* politicians mobilise such antagonisms and *how* they do so. Our analysis, illustrated by set piece speeches on immigration by the four main UK party political leaders in the period prior to the 2015 elections, suggests (a) that while these speeches are ostensibly about an intergroup issue they equally serve intra-group dynamics, notably demonstrating how the speaker serves national interests and hence qualifies to serve as a national representative; (b) the way that speakers mobilise antagonism to immigrants is through construing a variety of forms of threat: spatial threat, economic threat, security threat and diversity threat. We focus particularly on the last of these because of the ways in which it invokes social psychological arguments and hence speaks in our name. We conclude by raising issues of accountability – both of politicians and social psychologists – regarding the way we talk about immigration.

Key words: Immigration, mobilisation, social identity, threat, social cohesion.

Introduction

Immigration and Integration

In his 1979 book, *The Nature of Mass Poverty*, John Kenneth Galbraith wrote:

“Migration is the oldest action against poverty. It selects those who most want help. It is good for the country to which they go; it helps to break the equilibrium of poverty in the country from which they come. What is the perversity in the human soul that causes people to resist so obvious a good” (p. 7).

Where Galbraith argues for migration as an economic good, this is echoed in the official position of the European Union. Free movement of labour across country boundaries is heralded as one of the greatest achievements of the EU by the European Commission (EC, 2011). It is both an antecedent and an accomplishment of European integration. It serves to overcome both disparities of wealth and political/cultural differences. It is thereby fundamental to integrating people together within a common European citizenship (Joannin, 2014).

Where Galbraith observes that perverse fears surrounding migration can serve to undermine integration, this too is echoed within the EU. In August 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel suggested that ability to deal with migration placed the very existence of the European Union in question (Barkin, 2016). Merkel’s focus was on migration from non-member states into the EU. For many others, though, the concern was with free movement within Europe, especially following the accession of the A8 countries (a group of eight Eastern European countries) in May 2004.

Opposition to such movement has been integral to the growth of populist anti-European parties across the continent in recent years (Stockemer, 2016; see also Capelos & Katsanidou, 2018). It has been key to the rise of Orban in Hungary (Postelnicescu, 2016), of the Law and Justice Party in Poland (Adekoya, 2017), and the Conte government in Italy (Depetris, 2018). Moreover, the anti-immigration policies of such governments once in power has been a major source of tensions between states in Europe, with open hostility between Italy and France over the

treatment of migrants (Henley, Giuffrida & Connolly, 2018) and formal condemnation of Hungary by the European Parliament (Rankin, 2018).

Opposition to migration, then, is at the root of threats to European integration, both directly (by limiting free movement) and indirectly (by sustaining political forces that are both anti-European and which creates conflicts amongst European states).

Nowhere is this more obvious than in the UK where opposition to immigration was central both to the rise of UKIP (Dennison & Goodwin, 2015) and to the vote to leave the EC in June 2016. (Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017).

Mobilising opposition to immigration

So, to borrow from Galbraith, what ‘perversity’ explains such trenchant opposition to immigration? It does not seem to be derived from direct experience of incomers.

Indeed areas that voted most heavily for BREXIT were those with low immigration rates (Goodwin & Heath, 2016). As Bobby Duffy of the polling organisation IPSOS-MORI argued, fear of immigration drove the leave victory – not immigration itself (cited in Travis, 2016).

Moreover, such a pattern is repeated in Germany (Mudde, 2017) and Chile (Gonzales et al., 2017). It seems that anti-immigrant views derive less from what people directly see of immigrants than what it communicated to them about immigrants. Their understandings are not a matter of *perception* but of *mobilisation*. Our understandings of these understandings then require us to look as much at the mobilisers as the mobilised.

Some 30 years ago, Miles & Phizacklea (1987) showed how post-war political debate in the UK was characterised by a shift from dissensus to consensus about the problems of immigration and the need for immigration control. That has become more entrenched ever since with all sides in the BREXIT debate united on the need to limit free movement with Labour in particular apologising for its previous support for A8 immigration and describing such policy as a ‘spectacular mistake’ (Hasan, 2014). Clearly, this unified political voice is a key factor in explaining how people understand immigration.

In this paper, we seek to examine the role of contemporary politicians in evoking opposition to a Europe of free movement. Of course, we are not the first to focus on this role. Many scholars across a range of disciplines (political sciences, history, economics) have shown that leaders routinely employ anti-immigrant rhetoric (e.g. Bailey, 2008; Engel, 2010; Statham, 2003) and that such rhetoric is effective in mobilising public antagonism (e.g. Bohman, 2011; Brader, Valentino & Suhay, 2008).

They have also addressed the reasons why political leaders use such rhetoric and hence when they do so. Notably, it is argued that invoking danger from outgroups – specifically immigrant groups – creates unity and outlaws dissent (Bailey, 2008; Engel, 2010) and also serves to discredit opponents whose policies favour that outgroup (Glaeser, 2005). As a consequence, leaders are more likely to talk of dangerous outgroups – specifically, dangerous immigrants – when they are weak, threatened by rivals or lacking in legitimacy (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017; Tir & Jasinski, 2008).

Our aim is to add a psychological dimension to this debate. On the one hand we take these leadership considerations into the psychology of immigration and of intergroup hostility more generally where they are notably lacking. That is, psychologists tend to study how people form prejudices against outgroups in an unmediated way - as if they arise spontaneously from the way people perceive their social world. We propose to complement this focus with a mediated or ‘mobilisation’ perspective which asks how understandings of immigration depend on the explanatory resources provided for them (cf. Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017; Reicher, 2007, 2012).

On the other hand, our ‘mobilisation’ perspective provides psychological insight into the role of leadership in generating antipathy to immigrants. We do this in two ways. First, when it comes to *why* leaders invoke such antipathy, existing analyses tend to assume that this will increase their popularity and influence without addressing the processes by which this might occur. We draw on recent models of identity leadership (Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2011), particularly as they apply to political leadership and authority (Reicher, Haslam & Platow, 2014), in order to address this issue.

These models propose that authority resides in being seen to be representative of the group, to be acting for the group and to be realising group goals. Leaders, that is, present themselves and their views not in individual terms but as the reflection of a generalised public that they seek to represent (cf. Mahendran, 2018). One of the most effective ways of achieving authority, then, is to be seen to be defending the group against threats, especially threats to the very existence of the group. By identifying a threat (especially one which is not recognised by ones rivals), and by proposing strong actions against that group (especially actions which go beyond those proposed by ones rivals) one is in a position to claim to be a distinctive champion of ‘the people’. What looks like an inter-group phenomenon is therefore best viewed as deriving from struggles over intra-group power and influence (Elcheroth & Reicher, chapter 6).

In a world of nation states, where voting is based on a national franchise and where political power depends upon being seen to represent the national interest, the identification of an immigration threat becomes a particularly potent way of arguing that one is attuned to, concerned with and effective in advancing the national interest. Consequently, one would expect anti-immigration political discourse to be directed towards demonstrating these characteristics as well as in characterising the phenomenon itself. We investigate whether this is so and how it is accomplished.

Our second contribution concerns the question of *how* politicians mobilise antipathy to immigration, we have already addressed this to some extent, focussing on fear: that is, the way in which immigrants are constituted as a threat. The psychological literature has drilled into this idea in some depth. It has examined the relationship between outgroup threat and prejudice both in general (e.g. Stephan & Stephan, 2000) and specifically in relation to immigration (Quillian, 1995, see also Mitzen & Bially Mattern, 2018). Moreover it has distinguished between different types of threat, notably separating out ‘realistic’ threats to the safety and material well-being of a group and ‘symbolic’ threats to the integrity of a group culture or identity (Jetten, Ryan & Mols, 2017; Riek, Mania & Gaertner, 2006). We wish to examine the types of threat that are used by politicians in anti-immigrant discourse. But, in doing so, we also want to raise some issues about the way threat itself is conceptualised.

Rather than using the ‘realistic’/‘symbolic’ distinction, our own surveys of the historical literature suggests an alternative distinction between ‘existential’ threats which put the very existence of the ingroup in question and ‘non-existential threats’ which might compromise the standing of the group (either symbolic or material) but which leave it intact. We find that the former are particularly powerful in generating outgroup antipathy. Indeed most forms of genocide are premised on the notion that we must eliminate the other in order to survive (Herf, 2008; Reicher, Haslam & Rath, 2008). So to what extent are existential and non-existential threat discourses found in mainstream anti-immigration political speech?

In addition, there is one other type of threat discourse which particularly interests us as social psychologists because it rests on a specifically social psychological premise – namely that diversity destroys social cohesion. Thus, as the argument goes, immigration leads people to lose a sense of community, to stop seeing their neighbours as ‘one of us’ and hence to be less willing to act in ways that support the entire community, such as paying into a redistributive tax system (Collier, 2013; Goodhart, 2014).

Once again, we are interested in whether anti-immigration political discourse employs such arguments. To the extent that it does, then this places the relationship between social psychology and the immigration debate on a whole new footing. We are no longer simply outsiders looking in on the debate and applying our analytic tools to it. We become part of the debate itself and cannot interrogating the validity of the discourse. In such a situation, silence implies acceptance.

The present study

We address the issues raised above in the context of the run-up to the 2015 British general election. Before the poll, immigration was seen as the most important issue, alongside healthcare (Statista, 2014) and after the poll it was seen as the most important issue in deciding the outcome, alongside the economy and healthcare (Ipsos MORI, 2015).

Our focus is on key ‘set-piece’ speeches given by the leaders of the four major British political parties, Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats and UK Independence Party (UKIP). Accordingly, we omit the Scottish National Party – not because it lacks significance (indeed it has more members than some of the other and has more MPs returned at the election) but because it campaigns specifically in Scotland rather than across the UK.

We focus on speeches rather than, say, party manifestos (which could be seen to be the best and most comparable indicator of a party’s position on immigration), because very few people read manifestos (BMG, 2017) or update their political views from them. Instead, they rely on a wider information environment, including the speeches of party elites (Adams, Ezrow & Somer-Topcu, 2011; 2014).

What is more, we employ an analysis of single speeches by the party leaders, rather than a general analysis of all the speeches by party elites in the run up to elections, because of our interest - at this stage of our research - in the various ways in which speakers construe their own relationship, and that of immigrants, to their audience. Our focus for now is on mapping the various types category relations involved and the ways these are constituted. This requires a qualitative approach involving thick description rather than a quantitative approach which would require category relations that had been defined a priori (cf. Urla, 1993). It is the approach we and others have taken in previous studies mapping category construction (e.g. Reicher & Hopkins, 1996; 2001; Reicher, Cassidy, Wolpert Hopkins & Levine, 2006)

To recap, we analyse party leaders speeches in order to provide psychological insights into why and how politicians mobilise opposition to immigration. Within the ‘why’ we are interested in whether and in what ways leaders attempt to establish that they, and they alone, represent the group, act for the group and realise group goals. Within the ‘how’ we are interested in the use of different types of threat discourse, particularly the use of ‘existential’ and ‘non-existential threats’ and also the use of psychologically based ‘cohesion threat’ arguments.

Method

Choice of speeches

Our choice of speech for each leader was guided by three criteria:

1. In each case the party itself trailed the speeches in advance as significant position pieces which defined the party policy on immigration.
2. In each case it was made clear within the speech itself that the speaker was laying out the party position on immigration
3. In each case, the speech hit the news headlines and was treated as a significant statement of the party position on immigration.

The four speeches we analysed were as follows¹:

- David Cameron (Conservative Party): Speaking on November 28th 2014 at a JCB factory in Rochester, Staffordshire
- Nick Clegg (Liberal Democrats): Speaking on August 5th 2014 in London
- Nigel Farage (UKIP): Speaking on March 4th 2015 in London
- Ed Miliband (Labour Party): Speaking on December 15th 2014 in Great Yarmouth

Method

The analytic procedure we used in this study is akin to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We proceeded in two phases, relating to our two broad research questions.

In relation to why politicians take anti-immigration positions, we read through each transcript, looking for all instances where the speaker defined the categorical nature of their audience and invoked (a) either their own or their rivals relationship to this

¹ The full texts of the Cameron, Clegg and Miliband speeches are all available online (respectively: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-30250299>; <https://www.libdemvoice.org/in-full-nick-cleggs-immigration-speech-successful-immigration-systems-have-to-be-managed-41969.html>; <https://labourlist.org/2014/12/we-will-control-immigration-with-fair-rules-miliband-announces-labours-second-election-pledge/>). The text of the Farage speech was transcribed from a video on youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSB0JoMO0S4>

category; (b) how either their own or their rivals approach to immigration was based on the categorical interest; (c) how either their own or their rivals approach to immigration was effective in promoting the categorical interest.

In relation to how politicians invoke anti-immigration positions, we re-read the transcripts, this time looking for all instances which constitute reasons why immigration should be viewed as negative, should be controlled and/or limited. In particular, we looked for the different ways in which immigration should be viewed as a threat and we specifically coded for any arguments which base the nature of the threat on psychological arguments (e.g. diversity will undermine group identity and/or group cohesion). Note here, we do not include here arguments which relate to the consequences of the threat rather than the threat itself. Thus, for instance, to argue that an economic threat (say, loss of jobs) will lead to anger and fear that will disrupt society would not be included here.

Analysis

The 'why': outgroup antagonism and ingroup authority

We have referred to the leaders speeches as 'anti-immigration' speeches (not least because they themselves describe the speeches as about controlling or limiting immigration). Our concern has been with opposition to rather than support for immigration. Yet all four speeches started by emphasising that immigrants are a boon. The similarity of the speeches in this regard - despite the profound political differences between speakers - was particularly striking:

Q1 David Cameron:

Our openness is part of who we are... we must never give in to those who would throw away our values, with the appalling prospect of repatriating migrants who are here totally legally and have lived here for years. We are Great Britain because of immigration, not in spite of it.

Q2 Nick Clegg:

When Britain hosted the Olympics, we welcomed in the world and we revelled in our diversity. Our heritage is a glorious patchwork of different cultures and influences.

My mother is Dutch. My father's mother a Russian émigré. My wife, Spanish. I am like millions of British citizens whose roots can be traced around the globe.

Q3 Nigel Farage:

My family were migrants, in fact I think in modern parliaments they would be refugees. They were protestants from France... And perhaps we could move on to the early 1970s when there was a big debate in Britain over, could we accommodate the Ugandan Asians? The people that Amin was threatening to kill, the debate, could we accommodate 28000 people? And we did, and they turned out to be one of the most successful migrant groups ever to come to this country.

Q4 Ed Miliband:

I am the son of immigrants, parents who came here as refugees fleeing from the Nazis. I am incredibly grateful and proud that Britain enabled my parents to build a home here and have a family. They worked hard and made their contribution to this country. And I am proud of the contribution that immigrants of all origins, races and faiths have made to Britain over the years.

In each case, then, the speaker declares that the UK is (a) a country constituted through immigration; (b) a country that is favourable to immigration, and; (c) a country that has benefitted by immigration. To ground their personal pro-immigrant credentials, it is notable how three of the four foreground their own immigrant connections – either by descent or by marriage.

The only exception is Cameron who has no such resources in his personal history to draw on and therefore, in his full speech, devotes more time than the others in stressing the contribution of Jewish migrants, West Indian migrants and, most particularly, the migrants who were critical in the iconic 'Battle of Britain': "*We will never forget the Polish and Czech pilots who helped save this country in its hour of need*".

Having constructed the nation and the self in pro-immigrant terms, all four speakers then take two further steps. The first is to declare that the population (more than themselves) see contemporary immigration as a problem. The second is to insist that

they and their party are distinctive in providing an effective response to this concern. Let us look at each in turn.

On contemporary immigration being a problem perceived by the population:

Q5 David Cameron:

People have understandably become frustrated. It boils down to one word: control. People want Government to have control over the numbers of people coming here and the circumstances in which they come, both from around the world and from within the European Union.

Q6 Nick Clegg:

Up and down Britain today, around kitchen tables, in the pub, at work, conversation will turn, probably for the millionth time, to the problems of immigration: the unfairness people feel; the threats they see to their way of life. Does that make you a racist? No it does not. More often than not these are understandable and legitimate concerns.

Q7 Nigel Farage:

I think what's been felt by millions of ordinary, decent working families, is wage compression. An unlimited supply of unskilled labour, that has made for many people, the minimum wage in effect the maximum wage... The vast majority of British people want change, they want to control, not just the quantity, but crucially also the quality of who come into this country.

Q8 Ed Miliband:

When people worry about the real impact immigration has, this Labour Party will always respond to those concerns, not dismiss them. It isn't prejudiced to worry about immigration, it is understandable. So let me say how we will act to address peoples' concerns.

Here then, each speaker casts immigration in a frame of problems and fears – the nature of these fears sometimes being made explicit (lack of control, economic costs, loss of way of life – see the next section) and sometimes not. This framing is

attributed to the general population – sometimes simply cast as people, sometimes with the stress on ‘ordinary’ people (‘*around kitchen tables, in the pub, at work*’; ‘*ordinary... working families*’). And it is stressed that the people making the claim as well as the claim itself is reputable both in the sense of being moral (‘*ordinary, decent working families*’) and rational (‘*when people worry about the real impact immigration has*’). David Cameron’s words speak for all when he asserts: ‘*People have understandably become frustrated*’.

The word ‘understandably’ works in two ways here. It serves to validate the ‘people’s’ concerns but also to signal that the speaker recognises and accepts what people are feeling. This takes us to the second step taken by each of the party leaders. They all lay considerable stress on the way in which they and their party not only understand the popular experience of immigration but that they have the will and the policies to deal with it (as already indicated in the Miliband extract above). They also insist that this distinguishes them from all their rivals and thereby renders them unique.

Q9 David Cameron:

And to the British people I say this. I share your concern [concerning limiting free movement of migrants in Europe], and I am acting on it. I know how much this matters. Judge me by my record in Europe. I promised we would cut the EU budget – and we have. I said I would veto a Treaty that was not in our interests, and I did. I do not pretend this will be easy. It won’t. It will require a lot of hard pounding, a lot of hard negotiation. But it will be worth it. Because those who promise you simple solutions are betraying you.

Q10 Nick Clegg:

We are finally getting to grips with the system; finally dealing with people’s concerns; finally building a system in line with our values - open hearted, generous spirited, but not open to abuse. I just hope the Liberal Democrats get another five years in Government so that we can see it through.

Q11 Nigel Farage:

We are the only party in British politics that is going to talk and address, honestly, an issue, that is for most people their number one concern in British politics. And perhaps it's no wonder a recent opinion poll showed that we are now the most trusted party in British politics, to deal with this issue.

Q12 Ed Miliband:

Instead of false promises or false solutions, we will seek to offer clear, credible and concrete solutions which help build a country that works for you. And what we are doing on immigration is part of a plan for working people.

Only the Conservatives have the commitment to offer realistic as opposed to simple solutions; only the Liberal Democrats have actually got round to implementing acceptable solutions; only UKIP is prepared to be honest about the problem and its solutions; only Labour will offer concrete solutions rather than false promises. But this is not all. As can be seen from Clegg's extract here, the particular is elided with the general. Claims about Liberal Democrat approaches on immigration turn into a general claim about making real progress in building a system based on shared values and hence being grounds for electing the party to government.

Cameron and Miliband do likewise. For Cameron, the question of immigration is emblematic of the realistic way that he works for the nation: *"I have one test, and one test only: what is in the best, long term interests of Britain? That is the measure against which everything must be judged. If you elect me as Prime Minister in May, I will negotiate to reform the European Union, and Britain's relationship with it. This issue of free movement will be a key part of that negotiation"*. For Miliband, dealing with immigration is emblematic of the way of the practical way he works for ordinary people: *"what we are doing on immigration is part of a plan for working people. Dealing with our debts, but never slashing and burning public services. A sensible approach on immigration, not false promises or false solutions"*.

Only Farage doesn't make immigration emblematic of the general way in which the politician and his party relate to the electorate, but that is because there is nothing more general. Immigration (and its roots in membership of the EC) is the issue on which UKIP base their appeal. Accordingly, Farage's peroration is a simple repetition

of his arguments on this matter: *“Britain needs to take back control of her borders, control of her immigration policy, and let us turn what has become a negative in our society into a positive. Only UKIP will argue for that in this general election”*.

In a number of ways, then, these texts contain intriguing elements: self-defined anti-immigration set-piece speeches that laud immigration; speeches by would-be national representatives that (to the extent they can) parade outsider credentials; speeches by leaders which insist on how they are following the people. However, these various elements become intelligible if we bear two things in mind. The first is a strong public norm against displaying prejudice and racism and hence a powerful motivation not to be seen as prejudiced or racist (Plant & Devine, 1988), a motivation which is particularly strong for public figures who face rejection if they are seen to express racism (Blinder, Ford & Ivarsflaten, 2013).

Accordingly, it is important for the speakers to deny that they are prejudiced against immigrants especially in a context where they might be open to such accusations by giving proposing stronger measures against immigration and immigrants. Thus they praise immigrants and immigration in general so as better to oppose a specific (contemporary) form of immigration. They parade their immigrant connections so as to make charges of prejudice against immigrants less plausible.

Above all, all four leaders take a reactive stance in order to stress that the beliefs that count are not their own but that of the population. This takes us to our second point. Politicians are increasingly seen as part of an establishment elite who neither understand nor care about ordinary people (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018) – a perception which is particularly acute in the case of immigration policies (Ford & Goodwin, 2014). That is, politicians as a group are largely perceived as outgroup to those who they seek to influence. Hence a politician’s ability to appear representative and achieve influence depends upon differentiating him/herself from negative stereotypes of ‘the political’: unlike ‘them’ I face up to problems, acknowledge the limitations to what I can do, don’t give promises I cannot keep or else offer solutions I know won’t work. By the same token, gaining advantage over their rivals depends upon showing that they do fit these stereotypes. They exemplify a political class who mislead people with ‘false promises or false solutions’ (Miliband, Q12). Only the speaker is a true

and dedicated servant of the people who will do the ‘hard pounding’ (Cameron, Q9) necessary to produce ‘clear credible and concrete solutions’ (Miliband, Q12).

So, those features of the speeches which seem odd when they are seen as simply focussed on intergroup relations become intelligible when one sees them as equally attuned to intra-group relations. Much time and rhetorical effort is devoted to assuring the audience that the speaker is not a typical politician, that they stand by the people, that they act for the people and that they deliver what the people have asked for. They and they alone have earned the right to represent the people.

The ‘how’: Multiple constructions of threat

As we have shown, much of the time the speeches define immigration as a problem without explaining what the problem is: for the purposes of being seen to be representative, it is enough for the people to see something as problematic for the politician to respond. However they do not entirely neglect to say what is problematic about immigration. Indeed all four leaders went into some detail here. That is, as expected, threat was critical to the issue of *how* British party leaders mobilised anti-immigrant opinion.

Let us start with the question of who immigration is a problem for. There is only one reference across all four speeches which mentions immigration as a problem for the country of origin. This is where Cameron asks: “*can it be in the interests of central and eastern European Member States that so many of their brightest and best are drawn away from home when they are needed most?*”.

Two of the speakers, Clegg and Miliband, give brief mentions to the way that immigration can be a problem for immigrants. In a passage relating to illegal immigration, Clegg observes: “*What we do know is the damage it does. The crime. The black economy. The slave labour. The beds-in-sheds. No real winners except rogue employers and dodgy landlords*”. Miliband states that: “*There are truly shocking stories of people in Britain today having their wages stolen and having to live in the most appalling conditions*”. He continues: “*When people can be exploited for low wages or endangered at work, it drags the whole system down, undercutting the pay and conditions of local workers. We must end the epidemic of exploitation.*”

We must stop people's living standards being undermined by scandalous undercutting".

So, even when the problems for migrants are addressed, they are intertwined with problems for the host community. Cameron takes this a step further. He does invoke the notion of modern slavery and people trafficking when he asserts: *"I am proud that today we are publishing our Modern Slavery Strategy, clamping down on those appalling criminals who try and traffic people here"*. However he never explicitly mentions the suffering of immigrants and his broader concern is the impact of such abuses on the domestic population. Farage never makes even an implicit acknowledgement that immigrants might be victims.

Overall, then, the overwhelming focus in the speeches is on immigrants as a problem for the British nation. There were at least four different ways in which 'they' were said to threaten 'us'. The first is spatial threat according to which Britain is a small and overcrowded island in which we simply don't have any for space for incomers. Although such an argument is rather common within the general immigration debate (Ipsos Mori, 2014; Migration Watch, 2017) it is only mentioned by Farage amongst our four leaders speeches:

Q13 Nigel Farage:

And also, just think about this, in what is already the most crowded country in Europe, the fact that we have to build one new dwelling every seven minutes, just to cope with current rates of immigration.

The claim of over-crowding is obviously not absolute in the sense that there isn't enough physical space in the country. Rather it is relative to the availability of resources, in this instance, houses. In this sense, notions of spatial threat elide into a second dimension: notions of economic threat. Immigrants, it is claimed, put undue strain on our economic resources – sometimes houses, more typically public services (hospitals and schools in particular), welfare provision, jobs and wages.

All four leaders mention some form of economic threat and there is one issue in particular which is used by each one to exemplify the notion that immigrants

constitute an economic burden. This concerns the ability of people from other EC countries to claim benefits in the UK. It is claimed that such migrants – especially those from Eastern Europe - are attracted by and exploit an overly generous British benefits system. For instance:

Q14 David Cameron:

No wonder so many people want to come to Britain. These tax credits and other welfare payments are a big financial incentive, and we know that over 400,000 EU migrants take advantage of them. This has got to change. So I will insist that in the future those who want to claim tax credits and child benefit must live here and contribute to our country for a minimum of four years.

The only argument the other leaders have with this is the period before which benefits can be claimed. In ascending order: Clegg *“There will be no coming to Britain and claiming out-of-work benefits on day one”*; Miliband *“People who come here won’t be able to claim benefits for at least two years”*; Farage *“[immigrants won’t] qualify for state benefits until they have been in the country for five years”*.

All four leaders also mention a third dimension of threat relating to the security of the ingroup. In 2014 this was tied less to fears of terrorism (though these were not entirely absent) and more to a threat of criminality. This takes two forms. The one is to stress how a large amount of immigration is illegal in and of itself. This theme is heavily stressed by the two leaders of parties in the then government coalition, Cameron and Clegg. The other is to stress how immigrants commit criminal acts. Thus Farage stresses the need to keep out immigrants *“who have got a criminal record”*. Often, however, the two are combined and elided. We have already seen a glimpse of this above when Clegg refers to ‘crime’ as part of the damage done by illegal immigration. It can also be seen in Cameron’s speech when he proposes: *“stronger powers to deport criminals and stop them coming back. And tougher and longer re-entry bans for all those who abuse free movement including beggars, rough sleepers, fraudsters and people who collude in sham marriages”*. The result of such constructions is that the taint of criminality hangs over all immigrants (cf. De Genova, 2004) and that, even if not mentioned explicitly, the word ‘immigrant’ invokes the prefix ‘illegal’ and ‘asylum seeker’ the prefix ‘bogus’ (Every & Augustinos, 2008).

Thus far, these various forms of threat may compromise the collective interest, but they are not existential threats: that is, they leave the existence of the group intact. However the speeches invoke a fourth form of threat – diversity threat - albeit in a more indirect and coded form than what we have addressed thus far. Cameron, Clegg and Farage all refer to ‘change’ as one of the key problems posed by immigration:

Q15 David Cameron

(people feel) *their community has changed too fast.*

Q16 Nick Clegg

Some of our communities have undergone huge change over what is, relatively, a very short space of time

Q17 Nigel Farage

The people of this country are now deeply unhappy with... the changes that have happened within our communities

Miliband does not mention change, rather, in a passage where he asserts that “*People want there to be control of immigration. And I agree*”, and where he also asserts that ‘control’ means “*fair rules when people get here*”, he continues:

Q18 Ed Miliband *Fair rules means people integrating into communities and learning English.*

In and of themselves, these extracts tell us little or nothing about the issues: in the case of change, what is being changed, what is causing the change and why should it matter. However, the speeches need to be read in a social and political context where specific terms can invoke a wider worldview (cf. Billig, 1988). This worldview is encapsulated by a headline in the Sun, the UK’s best selling newspaper on 4th December 2016: “*Mass immigration to Britain has changed it beyond recognition and turned communities into ghettos*”. That is, the ethnic and religious diversity of immigration (signalled in the term ‘ghetto’) has changed the ‘British way of life’ and replaced social cohesion with social division.

These ideas are not limited to the media, they have been articulated in more detail in previous speeches of some of the leaders themselves. Thus, in what was seen as a landmark speech and change of position, (a speech reported by the Daily Telegraph with the headline ‘Migration threatens our way of life’) David Cameron stated in April 2011: *“real integration takes time. That's why, when there have been significant numbers of new people arriving in neighbourhoods, perhaps not able to speak the same language as those living there, on occasions not really wanting or even willing to integrate, that has created a kind of discomfort and disjointedness in some neighbourhoods”* (BBC News, 2011).

Or again, in a speech in Tooting on 14th December 2014, Ed Miliband also signalled a hardening of position on immigration: *“With many people coming here, especially from those countries new to the European Union, the last Labour government made mistakes. As I have said before, the capacity of our economy to absorb new migrants was greater than the capacity of some of our communities to adapt”* (politics.co.uk, 2012).

Or, most graphically, from Nigel Farage on March 31st 2015, at an event to unveil new UKIP posters depicting the iconic White Cliffs of Dover desecrated by a set of three up escalators. Farage was responding to questioning by a journalist: *“if we went to virtually every town up eastern England and spoke to people about how they felt their town or city had changed in the last 10 to 15 years there is a deep level of discomfort because when you have immigration at this sort of level then integration doesn't happen.”* (Mason, 2015).

For sure, there are important differences between the speakers. Whereas Farage is more essentialist in suggesting that the inherent difference of immigrants makes their presence sufficient to make integration and cohesion impossible, Miliband is more explicit that the choices made by immigrants determine whether integration and cohesion is at risk (hence his emphasis in extract 18 on learning English). Equally, some speakers, like Miliband, see the problems of cohesion in terms of relations between ‘host’ and immigrant communities. Hence, in the Tooting speech cited above he stated: *“Separation means isolation and you can't succeed in Britain if you are*

isolated. Isolation also breeds ignorance and ignorance breeds suspicion and prejudice – and it sometimes even leads to community to turn on community” (politics.co.uk, 2014).

Others, like Farage, contend that the problem operates within as well as between communities. Hence at the same poster unveiling as referenced above, he states: *“I want to live in a community where our kids play football in the streets of an evening and live in a society that is at ease with itself. And I sense over the last decade or more we are not at ease.”* (Hope & Bennett, 2015)

In this context of shared knowledge, the mere mention that immigration creates change does then invoke an understanding of what is being changed (way of life/culture/identity), what is causing that change (ethnic and religious diversity) and why it matters (loss of cohesion, the replacement of trust and harmony with discord). The lack of elaboration in extracts 15 to 18 is not a sign of an under-developed position but precisely the opposite: the notion of immigration as a threat to community cohesion does not need to be spelled out for people because it is so well ingrained that they can spell it out for themselves. It is a sign of a consensual representation.

Discussion

This paper starts from a mobilisation perspective in order to address antagonism to immigration and opposition to free movement in Europe – ultimately the force which was central to the rise of anti-European populist movements that are now in power in several European countries, and specifically to the Brexit vote – developments which are the most potent forces for the disintegration of the European Union. We start from the premise that people do not adopt positions on immigration in isolation or simply through perception of its effects. In addition it is important to examine how their positions are mobilised by different actors, notably political leaders. Accordingly we address both why and how politicians advocate positions against free movement using an analysis of the set-piece speeches by British party leaders in the run up to the 2015 British General Election.

All the speeches present immigration as a problem for the 'British' host community and advocate increased controls upon immigration both from inside and outside the EU. While there is occasional mention of problems for immigrants, this is limited and is normally paired with a discussion of how in turn this creates difficulties for the hosts (e.g. exploitation of 'them' leads to undercutting of 'our' jobs and wages). There is virtually no mention of any problems that immigration might pose for the countries of origin.

Despite this relentless problematisation of a migrant outgroup for a national ingroup, large parts of the speeches are strangely quiet on the question of what these problems are. Indeed, ostensibly they present immigration as a boon and the speaker as highly positive towards immigrant. Nonetheless, they acknowledge that the audience sees immigration as a problem and stress their deference to the audience's point of view. In so doing, they position the speaker as concerned with and attentive to this audience. They also focus on how the speaker has the will and the ability to respond to audience concerns. Furthermore they position the speaker as distinct from rival politicians in both respects.

Part of the speeches, then, use the problems of immigration as a given against which the speakers seek to establish their relationship to the audience – or rather, to the category (Britishness) which encapsulates the audience. They align self with nation. They constitute themselves as being of the people, acting for the people and delivering to the people. And they do this as a means of gaining political authority and influence over the people (cf. Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2011; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001).

But this is not all of the speeches, because they do also turn to the question of the ways in which immigration is a problem for 'us'. As we expected, the question of how our leaders invoke opposition to immigration is through constructions of threat. We identify four dimensions of threat: spatial, economic, security and diversity. The first three are differentiated from the fourth both in being non-existential and being explicit. Identity threat is existential, it is coded and it depends upon invoking tacit knowledge through ostensibly neutral terms (change). The first three are also

differentiated from the fourth in that they are direct and unmediated. To lack space, lack resources or lack security is bad in and of itself. The argument about diversity threat is indirect and psychologically mediated. That is, it is not self-evident that diversity is inherently bad. Rather, the argument is that diversity undermines peoples' sense of belonging to a unified community. This then leads to lack of trust and conflict. That is what is bad.

This takes us to the issue of accountability which has been a theme running throughout our argument. Mostly, we have addressed the accountability of political actors in creating a sense of crisis over immigration, even as “the sense of a crisis about migration amongst countries of destination is wholly displaced” (Gollerkeri & Chhabra, 2016, p. 51). Indeed, these authors continue: “far from hordes of people coming many ageing economies might actually have to incentivize immigration even to attract low-skilled workers who will have better opportunities elsewhere” (p. 53). The fact that these politicians increasingly cry ‘crisis’ in such circumstances lends further substance to the argument that their talk has less to do with the actual position concerning immigration itself than with their own political positioning towards the electorate.

So, let us remind ourselves of the words of John Kenneth Galbraith with which we began. More particularly let us reconsider the question he poses us: “What is the perversity in the human soul that causes people to resist so obvious a good (as immigration)”. Perversity, perhaps. But is it right to locate this perversity simply in the soul (or psyche) of the human individual? Our argument is that perversity is better located in political discourse and the ways in which this is used to achieve political authority.

This is not to say that psychology is irrelevant to understanding antagonism to immigration. Our argument has centred on psychology at two levels. First, the way that political authority is rooted in group processes and, more specifically, the ability of leaders to position themselves as being of the group, acting for the group and delivering to the group. Second, the way that political discourse draws upon psychological assumptions – and particularly the assumption that diversity undermines group cohesion.

So, while our lens has been primarily focussed on the accountability of politicians in the immigration debate we cannot avoid focussing on ourselves as well and the ways in which the diversity-cohesion relationship is treated in psychological research. We do not have space at this point for such a review. But suffice it to say that, despite some claims that diversity undermines the formation of a shared social identity and therefore makes groups less cohesive, less harmonious, less productive and leaves members less satisfied (for a review, see van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007), there is growing acceptance that (a) there is no simple and general relationship between diversity (including diversity due to immigration) and cohesion (Hickman, Crowley & Mai 2008; Saggar, Somerville, Ford & Sobolewska, 2012), and (b) that in some circumstances diversity can increase group identification and cohesion, especially when it is consonant with group norms (van Knippenberg, Haslam & Platow, 2007; Visintin, Green & Sarrasin, 2018). Clearly, though, the question of when diversity is or isn't a problem for identification and cohesion is one that requires further clarification and we have a responsibility not only to conduct the relevant research but also to inject the public debate so as to contest the simplifications and distortions that currently characterise that debate.

This is not the only area in which further analysis is needed. As we argued at the outset, this paper is intended as a mapping exercise, looking at the ways in which speakers define their own relationship, and the relationship of immigrants, to the national audience. In order to do that we employed an intensive qualitative methodology on a limited corpus of data (speeches by four British party leaders) which provided us with clear categories of analysis. Now we have these categories, then in order to examine the generalisability of what we have found, different approaches, such as survey methodology, would be more suitable.

Equally, if we want to examine whether the constructions we have found are effective (both in creating support for the speaker and opposition to immigrants) then the outcomes of this study could feed in to future studies as the basis for experimental manipulations. In sum, the methods we have employed may be suitable for the present mapping stage of research, but overall validation of our mobilisation approach to immigration will be a multi-stage, multi-method process.

For now we conclude with the observation that, if the prospect of European integration is to be kept alive, we do need a psychology of attitudes to immigration and to a Europe of free movement. But it is a psychology which needs to ask very different questions – and hence which will deliver very different answers – from those which currently dominate the social psychological literature.

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